

TITLE: Pragmatic Use of English as a First and Second Language in Q+A Web-Based Forums

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ABSTRACT

Corpus analysis of both written and spoken discourses has contributed immensely in describing various linguistic features. In recent years especially, corpus-based studies have compared the linguistic features such as variations in lexical and syntactical choices across web-based sources such as social media and reader forums, as well as many other domains. Web-based communication is a fairly new focus of study in corpus-based linguistic research, due to the novel mode of communication. This particular mode of communication shapes language behavior and audience participation in a different way than pre-web spoken and written communication has.

In this study I will be analyzing the variation of linguistic characteristics from a 400,000 word online English corpus based on question and answer (Q+A) forums. This specific compilation of Q+A forums includes discourse of speakers from the United Kingdom, the United States, India, and the Philippines and their individual varieties of English. I will be basing my analysis on the theoretical assumption that there are fundamental patterns of frequent occurrence of two or more linguistic features involved in the functional structures of texts. (Friginal & Hardy, 2014). Corpus linguistic studies of variation suggest that there may be methodical differences as writers choose lexical and grammatical features appropriate to this register of online Q+A forums (Biber, 2006). Coded from online source, the Q+A topic areas include: society and culture, family and relationships, and politics and government.

This study's main objective is to compare specific linguistic features of English Q+A texts in order to draw a conclusion about how and why a writer chooses the words they do by analyzing the following: (1) Private vs. public verbs and how they are influenced by attitudes and the concept of privacy in each culture; (2) Verbs and how their distribution may be influenced by language background and topic; (3) Adjectives and descriptive language used by social media participants across four countries; and (4) Uncertainty avoidance in the cultures through the use of certain parts of speech (e.g., adverbial hedges/qualifiers, first person and second person pronouns). By gathering this information, I hope to illustrate how speakers, depending on their country of origin and language background, use certain linguistic features of discourse across topics.